homework 7

Semantics 3, UCLA Linguistics

due May 16, 2022

English comparatives (well, one kind of English comparative) look like (1), so they've been given the analysis in (2), in which *-er* contributes the strict ordering, and *than* contributes nothing. (Although see Pancheva 2006 for a counterclaim.)

(1) A is taller than B.

(2) -er ([CP wh$_d$ B is d-tall])([CP wh$_{d'}$ A is d'-tall])

a. $[\![\text{-er}]\!] = \lambda D \lambda D' \exists d[D'(d) \wedge \neg D(d)]$ *or* $[\![\text{-er}]\!] = \lambda D \lambda D'[\textsc{max}(D') > \textsc{max}(D)]$

b. $[\![(1)]\!] = \exists d[\text{tall}(\text{a}, d) \wedge \neg \text{tall}(\text{b}, d)]$ *or* $[\![(1)]\!] = \textsc{max}(\{d' : \text{tall}(\text{a}, d')\}) > \textsc{max}(\{d' : \text{tall}(\text{a}, d')\})$

But the *than* clause is optional in English comparatives, as (3) shows.

(3) a. A is taller, especially these days.
b. Older students attended the party too.

(A) How would you propose to deal with the optional-argument comparatives in (3)? What are your motivations for your approach? (You don't need to provide a compositional analysis of these sentences, just explain informally how you would adopt (one of) the accounts in (2).)

(B) Intuitively, how does a prenominal comparative like (3-b) compare to a positive construction like (4)? Are there any truth-conditional differences? Any non-truth-conditional differences?

(4) Old students attended the party too.

(C) Use your favorite semantic treatment of positive constructions to provide a compositional analysis of (4). Compare it to your (more hand-wavy) analysis of (3-b) in (A). Do you predict the semantic differences you described in (B)? Why or why not?